

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7595

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: UK, PINT

SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP ELECTION SET

REF: (A) LONDON 16610; (B) A-1022

1. SUMMARY: CONSERVATIVE LEADER HEATH ANNOUNCED WIDE ACCEPTANCE OF PROPOSALS OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE (REFTEL) JANUARY 23 AND TIMETABLE OF ELECTION PROCEDURES. FIRST BALLOT SCHEDULED FOR FEBRUARY 4. END SUMMARY.

2. AFTER CONSULTING 1922 COMMITTEE, CONSERVATIVE PEERS AND CONSTITUENCY ASSOCIATIONS, LEADER HEATH TOLD THE 1922 COMMITTEE JANUARY 23 THAT THE PROCEDURES SUGGESTED BY THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE (REFTEL) HAD BEEN FOUND GENERALLY AC-

CEPTABLE BY CONSERVATIVES, THOUGH SERIOUS RESERVATIONS HAD BEEN EXPRESSED ON INDIVIDUAL POINTS. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THE CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION AS WELL AS THE UPCOMING DEMANDS ON THE PARTY, THERE WAS A GENERAL CONSENSUS THAT THE ELECTION SHOULD TAKE PLACE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

3. THE FOLLOWING TIMETABLE HAS THEREFORE BEEN SET: FROM NOW UNTIL JANUARY 30 FOR NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES; JANUARY 31-FEBRUARY 2 CONSULTATION WITH CONSTITUENCIES AND PARTY GROUPS; FEBRUARY 3 1922 COMMITTEE MEETS TO HEAR RESULTS OF CONSULTATIONS; FIRST BALLOT FEBRUARY 4; AND A SIMILAR PATTERN OF NOMINATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS FOR THE SECOND BALLOT (FEBRUARY 11) OR A THIRD (FEBRUARY 13).

4. HEATH ALSO ANNOUNCED HIS INTENTION OF REMAINING A CANDIDATE THROUGH ALL THREE BALLOTS.

5. COMMENT: THERE IS WIDESPREAD RELIEF WITHIN THE PARTY THAT A FURTHER PLATEAU HAS NOW BEEN REACHED AND THAT A FIRM DATE FOR THE ELECTION HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED. SELF-ANNOUNCED CANDIDATES AT THIS TIME INCLUDE, IN ADDITION TO HEATH, ONLY MARGARET THATCHER AND HUGH FRASER, WHOSE CANDIDACY APPEARS POSSIBLY DIVERSIONARY RATHER THAN REAL. ANOTHER CONSERVATIVE MP, JULIAN AMERY, HAS INDICATED HE MIGHT STAND IF ASKED TO DO SO, BUT WE'VE SEEN NO EVIDENCE THAT ANYONE HAS ASKED HIM.

6. MOST ANALYSTS AND PARTY MEMBERS BELIEVE THE RESULTS OF THE FIRST BALLOT WILL NOT BE CONCLUSIVE. THERE CONTINUES TO BE WIDESPREAD ANTICIPATION THAT, SHOULD HEATH NOT RECEIVE A RESOUNDING VOTE OF CONFIDENCE ON THE FIRST BALLOT, WILLIAM WHITELAW OR JAMES PRIOR MIGHT AGREE TO HAVE THEIR CANDIDACIES ADVANCED FOR THE SECOND. OTHER OBSERVERS FORECAST A GROWTH IN SUPPORT FOR MRS. THATCHER TO THE POINT WHERE SHE MIGHT WELL LEAD HEATH ON THE FIRST BALLOT WITHOUT RECEIVING ENOUGH VOTES TO WIN UNDER THE COMPLICATED MAJORITY AND LEAD REQUIREMENTS.

7. IN THIS KIND OF ELECTION IT IS DIFFICULT TO PROPHECY
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WITH ANY HOPE OF ACCURACY. IT IS, NONETHELESS, POSSIBLE TO SEE A SCENARIO WHEREBY HEATH MIGHT EVENTUALLY BE REINSTATED (ALMOST GRUDGINGLY) AS LEADER; THE SCENARIO WOULD ENTAIL A RESPECTABLE SHOWING ON THE FIRST BALLOT, NO WHITELAW OR PRIOR CANDIDACIES TO DEAL WITH IN THE SECOND' AND CONTINUING DOGGED DETERMINATION ON HEATH'S PART TO REMAIN A CANDIDATE IN SPITE OF UNFLATTERING VOTES OF SUPPORT ON THE FIRST AND SECOND BALLOTS. END COMMENT.

SPIERS

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